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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
 1
                       FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND
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                            NORTHERN DIVISION
 3
    UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,
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               Plaintiff,
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                                     Criminal No. 23-cr-0278-JKB
         ٧.
    CHRISTOPHER KENJI BENDANN,
 6
               Defendant.
 7
                                         Baltimore, Maryland
 8
                                         August 18, 2023
                                         11:10 a.m.
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                  THE ABOVE-ENTITLED MATTER CAME ON FOR
                   DETENTION HEARING AND ARRAIGNMENT
                  BEFORE THE HONORABLE J. MARK COULSON
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                          APPEARANCES
    On Behalf of the Plaintiff:
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         COLLEEN MCGUINN, ESQUIRE
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    On Behalf of the Defendant:
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         KOBIE FLOWERS, ESQUIRE
         MICHAEL ABRAMS, ESQUIRE
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                 Proceedings Recorded by Audio Recording
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          Transcript Produced By Computer-Aided Transcription
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23
                               Reported by:
                        Ronda J. Thomas, RMR, CRR
Federal Official Reporter
24
                    101 W. Lombard Street, 4th Floor
                        Baltimore, Maryland 21201
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Ronda J. Thomas, RMR, CRR - Federal Official Reporter

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    (10:22 A.M.)
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             THE COURT: Good morning, everyone. Government,
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    please call the case.
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             MS. MCGUINN: Good morning, Your Honor. Assistant
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    United States Attorney Colleen McGuinn on behalf of the
    Government calling United States of America v. Christopher
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 7
    Bendann. This is Criminal Case No. JKB-23-278. Good morning,
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    Your Honor.
             THE COURT: Good morning, Mr. Flowers.
             MR. FLOWERS: Good morning, Your Honor. Kobie Flowers
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    on behalf of Mr. Bendann. I'm joined at counsel table by
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    co-counsel Mr. Michael Abrams. Good morning.
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             THE COURT: Very well. Good morning. And good
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    morning, Mr. Bendann.
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             THE DEFENDANT: Good morning, Your Honor.
             THE COURT: You can have a seat.
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         Ms. McGuinn, let me say to both counsel, I have read the
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    Government's Memorandum In Support Of Pretrial Detention, and
    also have read the materials submitted by the defense in terms
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    of their exhibits. Looks like Exhibits 1 through 6. So I am
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    familiar with those materials, and of course I've read the
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    pretrial services report, again. So feel free to reference any
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    of those things with the knowledge that I've had some time this
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    morning to spend with them.
         So, Ms. McGuinn, I'll hear from the Government first.
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MS. MCGUINN: Thank you. Your Honor, as noted, the Government is seeking detention in this matter. The Government obviously does so in light of rebuttal or the presumption in favor of detention in this particular case because the Defendant is charged with five counts of child exploitation as well as possession of child pornography.

I'm not going to go through all of the facts or background in this case. I know that Your Honor is familiar with that.

I'm just going to mostly address the factors under 3142(q).

THE COURT: Ms. McGuinn, just before you do that -- MS. MCGUINN: Yes.

THE COURT: -- just so I'm clear, it does not look as though -- it looks like the exhibit to the Government submission was filed under seal but not the memorandum; is that correct?

So as to the factors under 3142(g), Your Honor, we'll first get to the nature and circumstances of the offense as charged. And, quite frankly, the weight of the evidence, they

Correct. One of the exhibits, yes, sir.

sort of go in tandem in particular in this case.

MS. MCGUINN:

As Your Honor knows, there are five videos charged in this case. They were all found on the Defendant's iCloud and as Your Honor saw in the Government's memorandum, not only were they found in the Defendant's iCloud, they were found in a folder called expunged.

As I indicated at the time that I drafted this memo, Apple has told us that an expunged folder is not created by the user, but it's created by Apple. In other words, when the user, on their iPhone, deletes a file and then deletes it from the device, in the iCloud it moves to an automated file called expunged. And it is clear in this case that the Defendant attempted to obstruct justice and delete the evidence in this case.

He had some leeway because he was placed on administrative leave from Gilman School, and he wasn't charged by the state of Maryland until February 3rd. He had almost two weeks. And the evidence, so far, supports exactly what minor victim indicated, that the Defendant told him he was going to delete everything.

THE COURT: Ms. McGuinn, understanding the description from Apple as to how items wind up in that folder, do the items or the information obtained tell us exactly the dates that the information was deleted?

MS. MCGUINN: No. And, in fact, we asked that. And all that we know -- I don't know if Your Honor has an iPhone, I just know that I do and a lot of other people. When you delete a photo from your photo library, it goes into a deleted file on your phone, and then you can go into that and delete it again. And then it goes into the expunged folder. There is no way, at this point, for Apple to tell when that transaction occurred. But the expunged folder does not exist in infinity. In fact,

1 it ultimately will clean itself out, vacuum and make room for 2 more. The iCloud, as you know, doesn't have unlimited space. 3 So the best that Apple could tell us is it was within the 4 last 30 days, but they don't know an exact date. THE COURT: Well, that's 30 days from --5 MS. MCGUINN: From the time the preservation letter 6 7 was sent and froze the account. 8 **THE COURT:** And when was the date of the preservation letter? 9 10 MS. MCGUINN: January 23rd. 11 THE COURT: All right. Very well. Thank you. 12 MS. MCGUINN: Sure. Your Honor, as to the five videos 13 themselves -- and I should note that in that expunged file 14 there are dozens and dozens and probably hundreds of images. The Government has obviously not had enough time to go through 15 16 all of those yet. They are still the subject of an ongoing search of the iCloud as well as the devices. But these are 17 five videos that were found quickly, and per the EXIF data we 18 19 know that the minor victim was under age at the time. 20 In those videos, Your Honor, they're, quite frankly, 21 striking in that they are exactly what minor victim said when 22 he gave his statement to law enforcement in January. The first video he's 16. He described that the Defendant 23 24 would sometimes pick him up and in exchange for that ride or

getting him home while he was drunk, so maybe his parents

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wouldn't find out, those sort of things, he would tell him to masturbate. Lo and behold, video one, the victim is 16, he's masturbating inside of the Defendant's car as the Defendant is filming.

Video two, same thing except the victim is a little bit older. He is being filmed inside of the Defendant's car, the driver, the Defendant, is flipping on the dome light, on and off, to highlight the victim genitalia.

THE COURT: All of this he's still a minor.

MS. MCGUINN: Still 17, all of these he's a minor.

The minor victim reported to law enforcement in January, that was how it kind of started that they would do these naked laps, that the Defendant would tell him he owes him; that then it became touch yourself; then it became him, the Defendant, touching him. And we see that advancement in just these five images. And this is only the first five that we have as of right now.

Video three, victim is still under age and victim had said sometimes this would happen at a home belonging to a Gilman family that the Defendant was asked to house sit for or babysit for. Lo and behold, video three the victim is in a shower, in a house belonging to a Gilman family -- in fact, one of the exact families he said during his recorded interview. And he's standing in the shower and the Defendant, you can see the Defendant in the glass of the shower holding his phone up as he

films minor victim, who is kind of somewhat slumped against the wall and clearly -- and obviously naked because he's in the shower.

Video four, the victim same, 17, and again as described, another home, a totally different and separate home in another Gilman family to whom the Defendant was entrusted to watch that house. Minor victim is there. Defendant has him go into the shower. The Defendant, you can see the phone is propped up -- the Defendant is full body clothed, reaches in, takes soap and a wash cloth and begins to wash the Defendant, almost like he's a little boy. Holding his hand, telling him where to stand and how to stand. Then he begins to masturbate this teenager.

Video five, Your Honor, is very similar, again as minor victim indicated in his statement. Sometimes this occurred at his own home and sure enough the EXIF data bears out at a time when he was 17 years old, at his own home in his own shower, very similar behavior to Count 4. The Defendant reaches into the shower and masturbates the Defendant after washing him and makes the comment of, inquiring whether or not it would be okay if he digitally penetrated the victim's anus.

The weight of the evidence, again, kind of goes in tandem with the nature and circumstances of the offenses. It's the Defendant's iCloud. It's in his name. It's in an expunged folder. Minor victim is clearly under the age of 18. The images are clearly sexually explicit.

The Defendant once said that this case is that of one victim or one witness's word against his. But it's not anymore. There are five, at this point, within a week of our first ability to really analyze the evidence, there are five images that minor victim was in fact truthful.

The history -- excuse me, history and characteristics of the person. The Government has indicated and wrote in the memorandum the Defendant does not have a prior criminal history, but that does not mean detention is not warranted in this case. The Government outlined for Your Honor that there are three, three other minor victims. One of whom is still currently a minor and a student who have made allegations and disclosures that the Defendant did somewhat similar behavior to them. One of whom describes that he woke up to the Defendant performing fellatio on him and that the Defendant then engaged in sex with him. He was inebriated and under age. Or under the age of 18.

There are two others who disclose when the Defendant was house-sitting and babysitting them at their parents' request, so in his custody and control, that they woke up in rooms where they had not fallen asleep, now completely naked with a blanket over them. One of them who the Defendant said, "Oh, you were sleep walking and sleep dancing and started taking off your clothes so I just covered you."

Those crimes a this point are not federal in nature, but

those disclosures have been made and are being investigated by our law enforcement partners.

As Your Honor knows there were numerous messages left and investigations done through Gilman that there are students, current and past, who all describe these same grooming behaviors as minor victim. That this Defendant would furnish them with alcohol, that he would pick them up from parties when they were inebriated, and they owed him. So he would bring them to Meadow Wood -- they all say the same thing -- and do naked laps. There were even some photographs submitted from parents of their child or a child's friend in a distance naked because he had been running these naked laps at the Defendant's behest.

The Government included in a memorandum some text messages that support that the Defendant would trade these victims, these children, students at his school, if you buy me vape pods or if I buy you vape pods, you owe me, you owe me a photograph.

THE COURT: Ms. McGuinn.

MS. MCGUINN: Yes.

THE COURT: A question on that, and you included some of the screenshots from the text messages, but it was unclear to me whether the text messages included were from any of these other three alleged minor victims or whether it was from another student.

MS. MCGUINN: It's from another student, Your Honor,

and this allegation is simply surrounding the drunk laps or naked laps as we sort of colloquially call them. It's not an allegation of the other three individuals I mentioned.

We know from that text message Your Honor sees the

Defendant specifically says "You can cover it with your hand if
you don't want to run outside." "You can go in the bathroom and
do it."

Again, this is absolutely, completely consistent with the types of behavior minor victim disclosed.

We know that Gilman has actually had conversations with the Defendant in the past telling him to tone it down. Don't babysit these families anymore. You're crossing too many boundaries and stop being so physical with the students.

Your Honor, these grooming behaviors that the Defendant has engaged in, while they are not criminal connections, have begun since before 2016 and continued through today. He managed to get minor victim to do further acts and we know these three other children, there are allegations from their disclosures. This pattern of behavior is clearly disturbing and it warrants detention in this matter. He is a danger to children.

And lastly, Your Honor, the nature and seriousness and danger of any person in the community if the Defendant were released. As I indicated, we have evidence at this point that he was obstructing the investigation by deleting everything or

attempting to do so wherein those images were found in an expunged folder. Again, not just the five that we've charged, dozens and dozens, upon hundreds of images that are being investigated at this point.

We have the pretrial services report, Your Honor, where it is noted the Defendant suffers or has suffered from some mental health issues and suicidal ideations. Your Honor, that is a serious concern here, too. The risk has seriously gone up now that it's not just one person's word against his. There are five videos, at a minimum, showing the Defendant sexually abuse a child.

His flight risk -- risk of flight certainly increases. I understand he has ties to the community but now that the evidence is much stronger, that risk certainly has increased.

More importantly to the Government at this point is the intimidation of witnesses at this point. The Government introduced in its memorandum that the Defendant has used the internet while he was on pretrial release in this very serious case in the state of Maryland. There are allegations of sexual child abuse and rape. And the Defendant went on the internet claiming that these were false and he wants others to know this.

He then stood on the steps of the courthouse indicating that Gilman in Baltimore have done their best to defame my character and make my former students question my relationship

with them. This is nothing short of gas lighting, that these other children have come forward and said other things that have occurred, or may not be free to say other things that have occurred because the Defendant used his opportunities on pretrial release to expound that this one minor victim is solo, he's the only one, and he has every reason to lie.

THE COURT: Ms. McGuinn, just a question. My reading of the state court release order did not impose an internet restriction; is that correct?

MS. MCGUINN: That's true and I'm not alleging that he did. Again, it's the way that he used it, what opportunity he took while he used it.

Your Honor, the Defendant has said that the complaining witness, as I indicated, has several reasons to be less than honest. The boldness of that, knowing that these videos exist and knowing that he tried to successfully destroy them is concerning to the Government. Minor victim has been nothing short of terrorized for the last several months with the knowledge that the Defendant is out and about in the community, that he is speaking about the case. That there have been implications of trying to out his name or say his name or imply what his parents do for a living. He's trying very hard to move forward in his young adulthood through college and other things, but yet this is constantly terrorizing him. He is not doing well in that regard and his well-being is constantly

threatened every day that the Defendant is in the community.

MS. MCGUINN:

THE COURT: So, Ms. McGuinn, let me just ask about that. So I understand you've referenced a statement that Mr. Bendann made on Facebook, I think it was, but in terms of these -- the minor victim having concerns that Mr. Bendann was trying to determine his identity or his parents. Where is that coming from? His parents -- the employment?

There have been statements made in court

setting and others about implying what his parents do for a living, where they work. Things of that nature. Nothing specific, not their names, but -- but I guess illusions to those things. Enough that the family has grave concerns. Minor victim is aware of all these things. I had an opportunity to meet with him several months ago. He is scared every day that the Defendant is out in the community. And now these allegations have just gotten more serious.

The Government maintains -- under the Victim Rights Act, the victim had a right to be here and speak. I will tell you, Your Honor, there are two attorneys in the courtroom, Mr. White and Mr. Silverman, they represent the victim's family. The victim's parents are not here, nor is he, he's at school. But I wanted Your Honor to know they wanted to be here. They are here in spirit. But it is just too difficult for them to hear all of these facts and information.

But I can tell Your Honor that they have asked that I

express to you they are in favor of pretrial detention. That they believe very strongly that the Defendant needs to be held until we have a trial date for their own well-being and that of their concern for their son certainly.

And lastly, Your Honor, as I indicated, although not an official factor under 3142, I do think that Your Honor needs to consider that in this case the Defendant is facing five counts where a 15-year mandatory minimum penalty could be imposed for each with the maximum penalty of 30 and his guidelines are life. All of that taken together, Your Honor, in combination with pretrial services recommendation that the Defendant not be released prior to trial, the Government would ask that Your Honor grant the Government's request and detain the Defendant until we have further proceedings.

THE COURT: Thank you, Ms. McGuinn.

MS. MCGUINN: Thank you, Your Honor.

THE COURT: Mr. Flowers.

MR. FLOWERS: Thank you, Your Honor. Before I start my argument, I just want to make sure the Court received everything. We've got courtesy copies for the Court. I've already provided a copy to the Government. And the courtesy copies simply have the motion that was filed in response to the Government's motion that was filed yesterday, and it has all six exhibits. I just want to make sure that the Court has that material and, again, I've got a courtesy copy for the Court

just in case the Court doesn't since I know this has happened on a pretty rapid time period.

THE COURT: I'll take the courtesy copy just to compare to what I have sitting in front of me.

MR. FLOWERS: Very well, Your Honor. May I approach?

THE COURT: Yes, of course. All right, Mr. Flowers, happy to hear from you.

MR. FLOWERS: Thank you, Your Honor. The only question before the Court today is whether Mr. Chris Bendann is a danger in the future to someone specifically in the community. The Government yesterday filed a motion and the arguments the Government made both today and on Friday simply focus on danger. They don't focus on flight risk. So I want to make sure we address those arguments. I'm going to go through the 3142(g) factors in addressing those arguments.

But from a high level, I think it's very important for the Court to realize that this case has gone on now for six months. I've worked both with the federal prosecutor and the state prosecutor on this case for six months. Mr. Bendann has shown up to every single court hearing for six months. I approximate that that's about 10 court hearings, including the sealed hearings here in front of Judge Gesner. There was also a hearing in front of Judge Maddox. Then he had several hearings out in Baltimore County.

Mr. Bendann showed up for all of those hearings and over

that six months no witness, certainly not the complaining
witness, has ever been put in danger. Quite the contrary.
Mr. Bendann has been put in danger at least two times by way
that the Government used a SWAT team to arrest him.

The first time they used a SWAT team to arrest

Mr. Bendann, deeply troubling that they would treat someone
that they knew had no criminal record, that they knew had never
engaged in any type of criminal misconduct. Once they did that
and they brought this SWAT team to his house in the predawn
part of the day, when it was still dark, they then -- they did
it on a Friday knowing that I could not get down and argue for
Mr. Bendann's release.

So he had to, for the very first time, go to jail as someone who has been alleged to have engaged in sexual abuse of minors. The Court is very well aware, as the Government is very well aware, when that allegation, when that dark cloud is put on you and you're put into a prison, your life is in danger. And this is not hypothetical. That's exactly what happened to Mr. Bendann.

And we fought as best as we could to get him out, Judge Alexander listened to what we had to say. Judge Alexander took into account the fact that when Mr. Bendann, six months ago, in February 2nd, 2023, when he was arrested he was being investigated for the very same crimes for which he now stands charged, child pornography. Nothing has changed.

THE COURT: But, let me just ask you about that because it seems to me a fair amount has changed since you were before Judge Alexander. For example, I mean, at this point obviously the charges, although the conduct is somewhat the same, the charges have quite an enhanced penalty from what they would have been in the state system, correct?

MR. FLOWERS: Absolutely, Your Honor.

THE COURT: There was no presumption of detention at the time of the hearing before Judge Alexander, of course as by congressional statute here, correct?

MR. FLOWERS: Yes, that's correct, Your Honor.

THE COURT: There is no corroboration of the minor victim's statements and now we have detailed corroboration in the form of these videos described by Ms. McGuinn.

MR. FLOWERS: I pushback a little bit on that, but we did not have the videos. There certainly was corroboration. In fact, there were the three complaining witnesses that you read about just recently, those were the three complaining witnesses that were in the state search warrant. Moreover, the three complaining witnesses that were in the state search warrant that now are being brought into the federal case, we've looked at the videos of those complaining witnesses.

So what I say is fundamentally this notion that

Mr. Bendann could face a federal case and look at serious time,

that idea, that notion, has never changed. That --

THE COURT: But, I mean, wasn't it a week or two ago when there was -- there were public statements about there's no corroborating electronic evidence or no -- let me -- I'll read from your original memo. No physical evidence, no photographic or electronic evidence, no text messages or other electronic communications and no documents. It's a single anonymous person statement. Period. That was the pleading before Judge Alexander.

That's not why we are today though.

MR. FLOWERS: That's not why we are here today. But let's deal with the electronic evidence that we now have, okay.

The Government has put forward five videos and said that they were in this expunged file, right? What I do know is that we're not very clear on when those videos were put into the expunged file and the date, quite frankly, that matters for everything here.

THE COURT: We're pretty clear, right, because according to Apple it goes within the expunged files within 30 days of being deleted and the Government's preservation order that Apple received when they froze that file was January 23rd. So don't we know as a matter of technology that that occurred sometime between December 23rd and January 23rd?

MR. FLOWERS: No, I don't think we do know that.

THE COURT: I'm sorry, December 22nd and January 23rd.

MR. FLOWERS: I'll tell you why I don't think we do

know that, Judge, is because we haven't had a chance to look at what Apple has done. Who was the Apple person? We haven't had a chance to figure out the forensics of this.

I will tell you this, we've done our own investigation and we've got a lot of this forensics ourselves. I will also tell you, Judge Coulson, as part of our investigation, as part of also the discovery from the stateside I know that some of the stuff is corrupted.

The next thing I will tell you, Your Honor, is that the lead complaining witness here in that video, that the Government is saying is corroborated now so many different ways, in that video, the complaining witness talks about how he, himself, got rid of videos. Got rid of photos.

I am not at liberty right now, Your Honor, to go into our full defense as to why are the complaining witness got rid of videos that had nothing to do with criminal activity. But I share that with the Court to say that getting rid of videos in and of itself is not a crime, even though the Government comes here and says, hey, well, that's somehow obstruction of justice.

The other thing the Court needs to know, which has not changed but now has impacted this case, is if we say that the videos, just hypothetically, again, I do not believe this hypothetical, but if we say that the videos were somehow deleted in that January time frame, Mr. Bendann was talking to

several lawyers about his employment situation at Gilman, and I am not clear as to what type of legal advice he may or may not have had to look at videos. I am not clear as to if you go ahead and delete something, whether you're doing it intentionally to obstruct an investigation. So that, again, we have this information now. Certainly that we have it is different than six months ago.

But, Your Honor, six months ago we always knew by virtue of the affidavit that the state had that this was a child porn case. Six months ago, Your Honor, it was the state government that went into really Lance Bendann's house and took all of the electronic devices. We always knew, and we got versions of those electronic devices, and we've got questions about the forensics on the electronic devices, so we've always knew there's been a question about the electronic devices.

So that's why I say, Your Honor, that, yes, now we can, by virtue of the Government's indictment, perhaps tell you chapter and verse about a specific video. There are other videos and there are other electronic evidence on those devices that go in the opposite direction.

So that is something, again, that, yes, on some level things are different because we have the specific electronic information. But on some level it really isn't. So, Your Honor, I want to go back to --

THE COURT: And you're also -- the recommendation of

1 pretrial services in the county was for release as opposed to 2 our folks.

MR. FLOWERS: That's exactly right, Your Honor.

THE COURT: All right.

MR. FLOWERS: And, of course in the county, to be clear, and, again, the reason why there really is not much of a change, in the county Mr. Bendann is charged with rape. If he gets convicted of one rape charge, he's going away for double-digit years, not different than what he's doing if he gets convicted of any one of those sexual exploitation charges in the feds.

THE COURT: So it's a second-degree rape in the state system has a mandatory minimum?

MR. FLOWERS: Oh, there's no mandatory minimum. But I'm confident that -- he's charged with 16 counts of, as I put in our memo, abuse of a minor, various types of sexual abuse counts. He gets convicted, particularly of the rape or even of the sexual abuse of a minor, or sexual solicitation, he's looking at going to jail for decades. That, Your Honor, qualitatively, realistically, is not any different than what he's looking with with the feds. Different cases, different charges, certainly, but it's not as if no one knew that there could be a potential child pornography charge in the federal system. Again, that was what was put on the affidavit in the state system. We've been investigating it. They've been

1 investigating it. So that's why I want to come back, Your 2 Honor, to the fact that Mr. Bendann has always known about the 3 seriousness and the gravity of this case. He has done 4 everything that we would ask someone to do when they're charged 5 with serious crimes, whether they're in the state or the 6 federal government. He has not missed, again, a court hearing. He has retained counsel. He has his family and his friends who 7 8 have come to get -- to rally around him. And have been, 9 really, at every single detention hearing. That's the 10 community that is here. And I want to focus the Court back on this SWAT team raid 11 of Mr. Bendann's house. It's not even Chris Bendann's house 12 13 but it's his father, Lance Bendann, who is seated in the 14 courtroom today. The reason that this case is so troubling, and I call it 15 16 an abuse of power --17 **THE COURT:** Help me with how that helps me in my 18 decision-making on detention or release? Whether the 19 Government did or did not use whatever force they used in the 20 arrest? 21 MR. FLOWERS: It gives you two ways to know, okay. 22 Number one, this Court has got to determine -- make credibility 23 determination about the Government's argument versus the 24 defense's argument. And so the Court ought to be able to look 25 at the Government's actions versus the defense's actions and

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    see who is the honest broker here. Who is the one just trying
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    to follow the facts and the law where they go.
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             THE COURT: Well, Mr. Bendann said two weeks ago, I
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   want friend and family to know these allegations are false.
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    I've been wrongly accused along with 3,300 plus people in this
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    great country. So the Government's methods of his arrest,
    somehow, counterbalance that?
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             MR. FLOWERS: I'm not sure I understand the Court's
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    question? Is the Court saying that that's the false statement?
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             THE COURT: The Court is saying that I'm looking at
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    credibility, you've just told me to look at credibility. You
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    want me to consider the methods of arrest, and I'm
    counterbalancing that with Mr. Bendann's statements that the
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    allegations are false when, in fact, we've got five videos of a
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    minor victim and Mr. Bendann and also in his vehicle.
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             MR. FLOWERS: Again, I haven't seen these videos.
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    Court hasn't seen these videos. And at some stage, right,
    Mr. Bendann under the Bail Reform Act is presumed innocent and
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    so that he gets up and says --
             THE COURT: Well, he's presumed innocent for all of
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    his proceedings, of course.
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             MR. FLOWERS: That's right.
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             THE COURT: There's no question about that.
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         But the presumption is, as to the charges, is, you know,
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    different to some extent with whether he's a danger to the
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community, right? I mean, everybody who comes in here for a
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    detention hearing is presumed innocent.
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             MR. FLOWERS: That's right.
             THE COURT: But I'm supposed to look at certain
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    statutory factors.
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                           I'm going to go through the factors.
             MR. FLOWERS:
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    want to address the Court's very good question about
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    credibility issues. It seems that the Court is suggesting
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    somehow, by Mr. Bendann saying, hey, I'm innocent, I didn't do
    this, and because there are these videos out there that we have
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    not seen --
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             THE COURT: But he allegedly took and is pictured in.
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             MR. FLOWERS: Allegedly and, again, we have not seen
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    these videos at all. If we're going to say, hey, let's just
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    look at the allegations and say they're truthful, okay, then,
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    you know, what Mr. Bendann said a week ago is problematic. But
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    if you're going to say this person is presumed innocent, this
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    person gets to at an arraignment say not guilty to the charges,
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    this person can go out and say exactly that and not be said to
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    have said something that is incredible or unbelievable.
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         It's a fact in this country that people are incarcerated
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    wrongly all of the time.
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             THE COURT: There's no question but help me get back
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    to the Bail Reform Act.
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MR. FLOWERS: Right. Getting back to the Bail Reform

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Act. And, again, the Government's overreaching here to say
that this -- Mr. Bendann should be incarcerated even though
he's been on six months release with conditions and having no
problems.

The problem there, Your Honor, is this, we've been working with the Government for six months. When the Government decided to bring charges, knowing that Mr. Bendann was at his house 24/7 lockdown, knowing that we had been working with the Government, the Government could have, if it was just playing fair, if it was just playing straight, said, listen, why don't you come down and self-surrender? That's what's happening to a former president who's been charged with racketeering, influence, corrupt organizations, with respect to the January 6th. That is what happens to police officers that I have prosecuted who are charged and alleged to have engaged in excessive force. And in both of those situations, lawyers were involved. Why not here?

And I share that with the Court because, again, if we are just trying to be kind of cool-headed and rational and not do more than what's needed, then there wouldn't have been a SWAT team that had came to Mr. Bendann's house, traumatized and terrorized not only Mr. Bendann, but also his 78-year-old father, who's here in Court and has nothing to do with this. When there's a lawyer involved, all they had to do is pick up the phone and give the call.

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             THE COURT:
                         Don't you have an avenue for redress if
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    that's the charge the Government used excessive force in
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    effectuating the arrest, isn't there a whole avenue that you
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    could pursue that? I'm just trying to --
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             MR. FLOWERS:
                           Right.
             THE COURT: The issue in front of me is detention or
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    release.
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             MR. FLOWERS:
                           Right.
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             THE COURT: And I think you're implying the force was
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    excessive and therefore anything the Government does should be
    viewed under the lens of they're making arguments beyond the
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    evidence they actually have, is that the argument?
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             MR. FLOWERS: That is the argument, Your Honor.
             THE COURT: Okay.
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             MR. FLOWERS: Let me direct you again to the factors
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    so we can put some more meat on the bones to that argument,
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    Your Honor.
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             THE COURT:
                         Okay.
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             MR. FLOWERS: All right. Under factor 3142(g)(1), you
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    look at the nature and circumstances of the offense charged.
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    Again, six months ago we always knew they were very, very
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    serious charges. Mr. Bendann has done everything he could to
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    litigate and defend against those very serious charges.
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    months ago we also knew that the complaining witness is an
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    adult and that these charges happened some five years ago.
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Five, six, seven years ago from 2017, right, that's six years ago, to 2019, right, that's four years ago. So these charges are, you know, have several years on them. And there's nothing, even with respect to these charges, which are very, very serious, that demonstrates that since 2019, even assuming the allegations are true, and we don't, pretty much assuming that they're true, these happened four years ago and nothing has happened since.

THE COURT: Wasn't there a text message in December of 2022 between Mr. Bendann and the minor victim referencing sending additional photos?

MR. FLOWERS: Again, that text message, we've just seen that text message. He is not charged with that text message. I will tell you that the three complaining witnesses that are, again, not charged with but they're now being used to say, hey, there's somehow some corroboration with the number one complaining witness, one of those complaining witnesses is the complaining witness number one's best friend. And that complaining witness number two, I believe, is the one who went out to complaining witnesses three and four, and said, hey, why don't we all say that, you know, Mr. Bendann was involved in misconduct.

So there's been this rumor mill around Gilman that these complaining witnesses have kind of ginned up and that's not corroboration. Moreover, Your Honor, again, having looked at

the video of the complaining witness, we have an expert who's looked at that video, and that expert tells us that the complaining witness has some credibility issues. Again, I don't want to go too far down this road into detail. But just as the Government comes here and says, hey, we talked to some person at Apple, unnamed, unknown, at some time, and they told us that an expunged file must have been expunged on this date, but we don't have any documents of that; likewise, I bring to the Court that we've had experts actually look at these, at the complaining witness's video, and there are credibility issues with the complaining witness. So that goes a little bit to both the nature of the offense charged under 3142(g)(1) and the evidence against Mr. Bendann.

Another very key point about credibility of the complaining witness and the complaining witness's best friend, who's been out ginning up people to come forward, practically on day one of this case, the complaining witness has had a plaintiff's lawyer, and Mr. Silverman and Mr. White, who have been telling the media that this is just the tip of the iceberg. So they, too, have been ginning up the rumor mill such that the complaining witness, again, the best friend of the complaining witness, he gets these other complaining witnesses to come forward kind of in the investigator text of this rumor mill that's been ginned up by the complaining witness's plaintiff's lawyer.

Now, so that goes to the complaining witness's credibility and what we can and cannot believe. I add to that the fact the complaining witness's lawyer, there's a suggesting that that — the complaining witness will be able to sue Gilman if Mr. Bendann is convicted. Right? So there's a financial interest that also, again, is one of the reasons that, as I've said before, there are reasons to question the complaining witness. And unlike the Government, we didn't overstate that. We didn't say that Mr. Bendann was a liar. I'm not here to say the complaining witness is a liar. As I put in our filing today, we want to have the utmost respect, give the complaining witness the utmost dignity and humanity. That's why we're not out here naming his name. We could, but why would we? We're not here to, again, undercut this person's humanity.

The Government, by contrast, instead of saying: Hey, you know what, we've been working with your lawyer for six months, unfortunately we don't see eye-to-eye on where this case is going, we're going to have to charge you. Pick up the phone, come on in, and we'll have you summoned to court, and we'll move forward that way.

Right?

The restraints that we have shown versus the lack of restraints the Government has shown is, again, as the Court is making credibility determinations about danger and who to believe and what argument should carry weight, I submit to the

Court that it's our arguments that carry weight because we're 1 2 the ones who have not tried to get over our skis and overstate. 3 I want to be clear, just because Mr. Bendann raises his hand on the courthouse steps and the jail, wherever, and says, 4 5 hey, I did not do this, he is allowed to say he is innocent. Our whole justice system says you're presumed innocent. 6 When 7 we've got the complaining witness's lawyer out here calling him 8 a monster, he's supposed to sit in silence? 9 **THE COURT:** Do you have any proffer you would like to 10 make regarding the five videos referenced by the Government in terms of --11 12 MR. FLOWERS: Yes. 13 THE COURT: -- their, you know, the date reference or whether or not the victim was a minor in the videos --14 15 MR. FLOWERS: Yes. 16 **THE COURT:** -- describe whether or not that's really Mr. Bendann and his car. 17 MR. FLOWERS: Yes. 18 19 THE COURT: So let's get to that. 20 MR. FLOWERS: Well, the proffer on the five videos is the following: I haven't seen the five videos. 21 I just learned 22 about the five videos on Friday. But I do know, having looked 23 at a lot of forensic in this case, there is a question about 24 when the complaining witness turned 18. And so timing is going 25 to be everything in this case.

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So if there are forensic problems with these five videos, like there are forensic problems with other of the electronic evidence in this case, then that's going to be a significant problem because that demonstrates, obviously, right, that the complaining witness was not a minor, that the complaining witness was over 18, and, therefore, you know, these charges would not stand.

So that's the proffer I make to the Court that, again, I haven't seen these videos. I want to be crystal clear about that.

But what I have seen is a lot of forensic evidence in this case. I do know that the forensic evidence and some of the witness evidence suggests that the complaining witness was over 18 and was in a consensual relationship.

With respect to, Your Honor, to the history and characteristics then, moving past the first two factors on 3142(g), there can be no question that but for these charges Mr. Bendann has a stellar history and characteristics and reputation as the community would have it. Today we have in court six folks, if you all could stand for the judge so he can see you. We have six folks who have traveled here today to support Mr. Bendann and they're members of the community.

THE COURT: Thank you for coming today.

MR. FLOWERS: Many of them have written character letters, which I have provided --

THE COURT: I have reviewed them.

MR. FLOWERS: -- to the Court.

And these people, for them to stand up and show up for Mr. Bendann in this type of case is incredibly difficult. They put their reputations on the line because of how sex cases just are different. Whether you're talking about the sentences that are meated out, certainly whether you're talking about the opprobrium that someone must deal with when they are charged with a sex case.

That said, knowing this, knowing what the media is, knowing that there's a plaintiff's lawyer out here calling Mr. Bendann a monster, they still raise their hand and came to this court and said things like, "I do not believe Chris is a danger to society. I believe Chris understands the seriousness of the charges he faces, and he's been a law-abiding citizen." That's what John Claster said.

Andrew Eifler said that, "Chris, housesat for him."

I should pause a little bit on this house-sitting issue because until I got into the case, I never knew that it was okay for a teacher to house-sit for a student. I always thought that's something that's fraught with problems and peril. Not at Gilman. They had a policy whereby teachers were allowed to house-sit and babysit for students at Gilman. And Andrew Eifler knows about that policy, was a classmate, and said that Chris has often housesat for my parents when they've

been away, and he said that again. Not only given kind of the 1 2 notoriousness of this case, but given how important 3 house-sitting is. And that Gilman not only allowed it but 4 condoned it. Dr. Fairchild talked about how she has struggled with the 5 fact that the media has essentially already convicted 6 7 Mr. Bendann. And she says, "As he was arrested and imprisoned 8 I wondered, what ever happened to innocent until proven 9 quilty." I mean, again, the fact that we're arguing about him going 10 out and saying, hey, I'm innocent, I didn't do this, all of a 11 sudden that's considered obstruction. All of a sudden that's 12 considered intimidating witnesses. You know, again, we're not 13 the ones that send a SWAT team to the complaining witness's 14 house. We -- that's intimidating, not only for Mr. Bendann, 15 16 but for everybody in this community. What if it happens to 17 them? It already happened to Mr. Lance Bendann and he's a 18 78-year-old veteran. 19 Margaret Kidder wants the Court to know that, quite 20 simply, she doesn't believe that Chris Bendann is a danger to 21 the Gilman community or the general community at this time, and 22 she's known Mr. Bendann essentially all of his life. 23 Tim Wilkins, who's here today, talked about how 24 Mr. Bendann certainly doesn't pose a danger to anyone in the 25 community.

And then Kathleen Brosi, who actually used to live just houses down from Mr. Bendann, I spoke to her on the phone, she was scared and intimidated reading and seeing what happened to Lance Bendann's house for somebody, again, who is not violent, who has lawyers involved. And she wrote in to tell the Court, as a friend and neighbor, that she considers Chris Bendann family.

And all of these people, I want to be very clear, Your Honor, all of these people were told about the gravity and the seriousness of these charges. And facing the gravity and seriousness of the charges, they wrote in. You have their full letter. I gave you a sample of them there.

You've also got to consider what Mr. Bendann has done in the community. The fact that he went to Gilman. He goes to Skidmore College, comes back and teaches at Gilman, and really kind of holds every single hat, if you will, at Gilman, right? Was someone who was very well-regarded.

And I will tell you, as the Court is looking at this case and considering credibility issues, I will tell you that there's certainly -- there were those at Gilman that did not like Chris because Chris didn't kind of fit into the same box as everyone else.

THE COURT: What do you mean by that?

MR. FLOWERS: Let me explain and put some more explanation to that, Your Honor.

Mr. Bendann is 39 years old. Has never been married. Has never really had a family that is kind of more of your -- I want to be careful here -- a wife and, you know, who's a woman, and kids, he's not had that. But most of the teachers at Gilman do. And so Mr. Bendann, because he didn't have that, there were those at Gilman who looked at him a little differently. And I'm here to tell you Mr. Bendann hired other lawyers to deal with some of the friction that was going on between Mr. Bendann and the school all the way to the highest levels of the school.

I will tell you, Judge Coulson, as we've investigated this case for six months, there is a Gilman teacher, who is not here today, because she came to one of Mr. Bendann's original bail hearings, Gilman heard about it. And all of a sudden, we were no longer allowed to talk to her. All of a sudden, she was no longer allowed to support Mr. Bendann. And that was Mr. Bendann's mentor.

So there is something amiss. There's something going on at Gilman where this Court needs to take into account, when it's trying to consider the complaining witness who's a Gilman grad, he's clearly on the side that Gilman wants to protect, Mr. Bendann is not. Mr. Bendann has always had issues with the school because of kind of how he is perceived, that is not having a wife and family and kids at his age. And this whole babysitting situation, house-sitting situation, that was one of

the tensions that oftentimes came up, so it would be easier if you just had a wife, but he doesn't. And he should not have to be punished for that either, right?

Going back and finishing up. I'll say on, you know, the history and characteristics of Mr. Bendann, it is very important that the Court take into account that he has no criminal record, that he has done nothing violent ever. And to put him in a cage pending this trial will be incredibly destructive to his defense because of what he's accused with, because of his makeup and his mental health. Him being locked up in his house for 24/7, there he suffered a heart attack dealing with the stress and the pressure of this case.

Does this Court really believe that Mr. Bendann, after all he has gone through, is going to go out and hurt a witness?

Does Mr. Bendann really want his father to see a third SWAT team show up at his house? That's an incredible deterrent.

Finally, Your Honor, there is no specific allegation that Mr. Bendann has done anything to intimidate witnesses. It is only, well, he sent out a Facebook post or an IG post in which he said, I'm innocent. It is, well, his lawyer, that's me, went out and said, hey, we're fighting this case, and the complaining witness in this case is less than honest. I didn't call him a liar, I never said that. I didn't use words like the Government and like the plaintiff's words have used to call him a liar or monster. I don't think the facts show that, how

can they say that at this early stage, right?

And so as the Court is considering whether this person is a danger, we simply have no concrete evidence that he is. In fact, the concrete evidence that we have is over the six months he's been fighting this case he hasn't intimidated any witnesses. He's been the one who's been intimidated.

I understand the Court is less persuaded by a SWAT team showing up at your house in the morning and whether that's intimidating, particularly for somebody like Mr. Bendann, who had a lawyer who was working with the Government. I understand that. But what's important about that is not only, again, how the Government is overreached here by asking for detention, but what's also important about that is that the Court can take great comfort in knowing that Mr. Bendann never wants a SWAT team ever to show up at his house and will do everything he can to make sure he follows the conditions of release this Court sets forth as he as done for six months.

Thank you, Your Honor.

THE COURT: Thank you, Mr. Flowers.

Ms. McGuinn.

MS. MCGUINN: Yes, Your Honor. I just have a few brief comments. I'm not going to belabor the point. I do take issue with counsel referring to this as a child pornography. This is a sexual exploitation of a child. It's not a child pornography case. He isn't collecting some images and

transferring them. He deliberating filmed a minor who was 16 years old and 17 years old while that child was in his car, and while that child was in his shower during the time the Defendant was supposed to be house-sitting. It's not a child pornography case, it is sexual exploitation of a child case.

I have the benefit of being a state prosecutor for 20 years before I came to this job. The guidelines on sexual child abuse and second-degree rape average about four to nine years on a first offense. And I can tell you having stood in this role as a state prosecutor, getting four to nine years in a situation where you're relying only on the word of a victim is really difficult and that was the position the state was in until a few days ago.

However, the guidelines are still four to nine. As Your Honor pointed out, it's not a mandatory minimum and there's no guarantee a judge will give him any jail time, let alone decades as counsel is alleging. I've rarely seen decades on a first time offender in a rape case in my 20 years as a state prosecutor.

Your Honor, the other thing I wanted to clarify for the record is counsel is saying that these three witnesses, other minor victims, were all known about. It's untrue. And, in fact, the Government put in the memorandum that in May of 2023 a victim has come forward. That information was not available. That victim has not been — that disclosure has not been made

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known because it's still part of an investigation. And I was given permission specifically to mention it today to help argue for detention here. That person is completely different and separate from what counsel already knows through the state discovery.

And, Your Honor, lastly, we haven't been working together for six months. That implication that we've been holding hands and working together is far, far from what's been going on. have worked collaboratively, as the defense and the Government often do when there are litigation issues and things that need to be resolved so we can be most judicious with the court as to the time. Counsel has been fighting, as is his right, for issues regarding a search warrant and that's totally fine. Ι don't take issue with his fighting. We haven't been working together. We have worked collaboratively to make that process smooth, to make sure everything was presented correctly. We have been cordial with each other, which is, as Your Honor I know this Court values that, that everyone tries that. We've not been working together.

The Government's job is to hold people accountable for committing crimes, and in this case the Government charged the Defendant with sexual exploitation of a child, not one time, not two times, but five times, and to imply that this was in some way some sort of consensual relationship and that makes the other videos okay. I direct Your Honor to the text

messages that we included that were part of the state warrant that counsel has known about all along. He calls him puppy. "Puppy, answer." "Puppy, snap back at me." That's not loving.

That's not consensual.

And how do you get to that point when he was 21 years old? We got to that point because he had been coercing him all along in his early boy -- excuse me, his late boyhood and early teens to get to that point.

He is, in fact, a danger to children. This is not the first time he has done this. This is not the first time he has groomed children. He is a danger to children, Your Honor, and he needs to be detained pretrial.

THE COURT: Ms. McGuinn, just, I don't want to belabor matters that were pending before the Court in another context, but in terms of when the Government got the electronic evidence in this case and began its review?

MS. MCGUINN: We were granted permission by this

Court, the order is dated August 8th. We did not know about
the order until August 10th. We knew it should have been
coming. We were looking for it I contacted Judge Maddox's
chambers, I believe, on Thursday the 10th, and said, "Hey, did
Judge Maddox issue an order?" There was, in fact, a ECF.

Because it's under seal, I couldn't access it. So we were
given permission to resume searching the digital evidence on
August 10th.

THE COURT: All right. Thank you, Ms. McGuinn.

Mr. Flowers anything else?

MR. FLOWERS: Yes, just briefly, Your Honor. You know, this notion that, well, he's looking at four to nine years and not 10 years, that's easy for a prosecutor to say, and probably hasn't been over to the Super Max and see what it's like to be in the cage and have an accusation about you did something to a kid. One day, one day and your life is in jeopardy. And that's what this prosecutor is asking to send Mr. Bendann back to.

So, you know, whether it's 10 years or nine years, it's of no moment. One day. This idea that the prosecutor gets to get up and say, well, you know what, there are these other witnesses that counsel doesn't know about but the Court should now take that into account, how do we counter ghost witnesses, Your Honor? That's not fair but that's indicative of what we've had to deal with throughout this case. Why is he dealing with a SWAT team when he would have walked in here happily and said, "What do we need to do?" They're not playing fair.

And then this idea that we haven't worked together. I appreciate Ms. McGuinn allowing for lawyers to litigate important issues, and the issue that we were litigating is of the utmost import because it was this U.S. Attorney's Office that raided my law firm illegally and took electronic devices and went through client's secrets and work product of lawyers

1 and products. They did the same --2 THE COURT: Not in this case. 3 MR. FLOWERS: They did the same thing here, Your Honor, yes, they did. They knew that Mr. Bendann had a lawyer 4 that was involved with what was going on with his employment 5 6 situation at Gilman. So I filed a motion to stop them from 7 going through those devices, and they're trying to say that we 8 somehow delayed --9 **THE COURT:** Devices were in the custody of your law firm at the time? 10 11 MR. FLOWERS: No, they weren't in the custody of my law firm. 12 13 THE COURT: But, I mean, the situation where you 14 described there was a warrant executed at your law firm, that 15 was not this case? 16 MR. FLOWERS: It was this case because the holding of 17 In Re Search Warrant issued June 13, 2019, 942 F.3d 159, Fourth 18 Circuit, again, 2019 case, the holding of that case by Judge 19 King is that searching through devices and trying to figure out 20 what's privileged and what's work product, that's not an 21 executive function. That is not something that your adversary 22 should do. They knew because I told them early on, as soon as 23 they took those devices I sent an email to Ms. McGuinn and the 24 state prosecutor and anybody that would listen. I told them 25 there was privileged information on those devices.

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THE COURT: But, but -- those devices were not -- the search warrant was not executed at your law firm in this case, correct? MR. FLOWERS: That's 100 percent correct, Your Honor. THE COURT: Look. I understand the argument. argument is privileged materials, according to Judge King's opinion that you just cited. I'm very familiar with that there should be a different process and I understand that process has been ongoing here. MR. FLOWERS: So -- I'm sorry. **THE COURT:** But I just wanted to make it clear that this was not a search warrant served on your law firm in this

case.

MR. FLOWERS: I want to be crystal clear, and I want to repeat, crystal clear, and I just want to repeat, and forgive me for not making it clear, this was not a search warrant served on a law firm. And one of the ways the Government typically tries to distinguished *In Re Search* Warrant, June 13, 2019, is by saying, wait a minute, wait a minute, lawyers are special, lawyers are different, if it happens in a law firm then we need to have a special master. That's not what the holding of *In Re Search Warrant* June 2019 Judge King did not say lawyers are special, and we set them apart. No.

What it said was when you have something that is

privileged and protected, because you've been working with the lawyer or you're countenancing litigation, then you're adversary. The prosecutor can't go through and find your secrets.

They went through his phones and electronic devices and tried to find his secrets. Not only was my law firm involved, but there was another lawyer that was involved. Because as I've tried to explain, there's been tension between Mr. Bendann and Gilman so he had lawyers involved.

So that's this -- this delay. It's not our doing.

They've known about this case since 2019 when they grabbed these devices and we sent an email saying, hey, there's privileged information on there. They could have stopped and did the right thing, and we ended up litigating it.

So when we say we were -- what I meant by working together, certainly, I understand the prosecutor is trying to put him in a cage. We are not working together on that at all. We're working together on we've been litigating this case in a professional way. I'll agree with her on that. If you've been working with someone in a professional way to then send a SWAT team to that person's house, when you know that they're not a danger, you know you've got a 78-year-old man who has a heart condition, that you send a SWAT team in anyway. What's that about? It's not playing fair and they should not be rewarded for not playing fair. Your Honor should release Mr. Bendann on

conditions.

THE COURT: Thank you. Anything else, Ms. McGuinn?

MS. MCGUINN: No, Your Honor.

THE COURT: So the Court is very mindful, Mr. Bendann, of the presumption of innocence that goes along with any criminal charges that come from our grand jury or otherwise that get filed in this court. And the Court keeps that in mind. And of course the Court is also very aware, as it has stated in other cases, that in cases like this involving the alleged exploitation of a minor, the allegations themselves are very charged. And the Court is always reminding itself to not let that distract, overly distract, from its analysis under the Bail Reform Act.

That said, the nature of those allegations is serious. Everyone has alleged or has acknowledged that. And, unlike some other types of crimes that get brought in this court, Congress has created a presumption of detention as to those allegations because they involve the sexual exploitation of a minor. There are other crimes that fall under that category, but this is what's called a presumption case.

Now, that is a rebuttable presumption and obviously the defense is free to come forward with evidence that they think rebuts the presumption of detention. There is some lack of clarity as to exactly what that burden is. I view that as merely a burden of production that the defense is to come

forward with evidence that tends to negate the judgment that Congress has made regarding the allegations. And, for example, by coming in and pointing to six months on county release apparently without incident, that would be the type of evidence that I think could indeed rebut that presumption of detention.

Now, it doesn't go away entirely. It's still a factor, as Judge Hollander in the *Anderson* case found. It's still a factor that needs to be considered with this Court because, of course, one of the factors under the Bail Reform Act is the nature of the conduct at issue in the case.

Second thing is the strength of the proffer. The Government has proffered to the Court of more importance in my decision-making five videos involving the minor victim that they indicate were all taken during his minority. That there is information on those videos that indicates that you were involved in making the videos, both by appearing in some of them, your vehicle in one of them, and I think that's -- I think the allegations, the appearance in all but the one where it was your alleged vehicle. That is a strong proffer in a case involving the sexual exploitation of that alleged victim. So that of the allegations in the case we have, as described by the Government, video evidence. Of course there will be a trial. There will be experts, I'm sure. Perhaps that evidence will ultimately get challenged. But for what we know today, for purposes of my decision-making, the Government's proffer is

strong in the case.

I do want to make a comment, I guess, about the other alleged victims in the case. And I understand that there are some other folks that have come forward making allegations. I always have a difficult time in the context of a detention hearing figuring exactly what to do with uncharged conduct and allegations about other potential crimes and other potential victims. I think it is something I can consider but I must say in my decision-making here today, I have not given that great weight because, quite frankly, I'm not sure that I need to consider that strongly given the fact that we have these videos in evidence.

So we have that factor.

Now, in your favor, of course, you have no criminal history. That is an important factor for this Court. Very often in detention hearings I am faced with a fairly long and lengthy criminal history, both in these types of cases and other types of cases that certainly is something that weighs in your favor.

I will say, however, that it's not just criminal history, it is the characteristics of the individual, it is past conduct of the individual. We do have some proffer in this case about some of that conduct. We've got a text message or text messages when you were in a position of trust as a teacher and in some cases advisory of students. We have text messages

involving students at the school. Of course we have the allegation from the complaining witness who was a student and one of your advisees at some point at the school. So I think I do take that into account as well in terms of your past history and characteristics. That is not to say that all of the folks that you brought here today, who are very willing to stand up for you, I understand that, to the extent that these allegations are ultimately proven, that will show that you may well have been very adept at separating the conduct at issue. Again, you're presumed innocent of those charges, so we don't need to reach that question today. But I think it is a factor for my consideration in the case.

Frankly, the factor that I struggled with the most or I guess the fact that I struggle with the most here is you do have this history of compliance with the state system of six months. We do have a decision by a state court judge in hearing argument back in February of 2023 who opted to release you on conditions of release.

So the question for me becomes, well, Judge Coulson, if you're looking at whether somebody will be compliant, shouldn't you, if you're not bound by that state court judge's opinion necessarily, shouldn't you give it consideration, shouldn't you look at that period of time in terms of making a determination? So a couple of things about that.

One is, of course, I've got a recommendation from pretrial

services for detention in the case. The reason the Court often takes that to some extent into consideration is that pretrial services has a history with all of our folks on release.

We have more than our share of similar types of conduct that is charged and their experience with hundreds of folks on supervision gives them a pretty good gut, I think, of folks that they think can be successful on supervised release.

They've recommended detention in the case.

But I started the hearing by talking about some of the important differences that I saw between the posture of the case back in February of 2023 and its posture today. So at the time that the arguments were being made to judge -- I think it was Judge Alexander in the state -- I think there was some key differences.

First of all, in the state charges there was no presumption of detention, unlike the presumption that Congress has put on these charges. The charges were different. The penalties, obviously, were different. Here in the federal court we do have the 15-year mandatory minimum sentences for each of the six counts of child exploitation, exploitation of a minor. That certainly does, in the Court's view, up the ante.

I take Mr. Flowers's point that any period of incarceration is obviously significant for the Defendant. But certainly the potential for what would amount to perhaps a life sentence under current guidelines puts this case in a different

posture in terms of consequences.

There were also at that time, and this was -- I'm not faulting anyone for making this argument. There was no corroboration of the complaining minor victim in the case as it was postured before Judge Alexander. The results of this investigation of the electronic devices were not known until just a couple of weeks ago here. But at the time those -- that evidence that I find very important in my decision-making, five videos, was not before Judge Alexander. Again, the recommendation in the state level was for release. Here it is for detention.

Then we have evidence as proffered by Ms. McGuinn that after the allegations, but just prior to the arrest, that the five videos were deleted sometime in the 30 days before January the 3rd, 2023, when the Government issued a preservation letter to Apple. We also had, I think at the time of the initial state court decision making had not yet — they had not yet done a pretrial investigation here, of course we have a pretrial report from our pretrial services officer who has recommended detention.

So I do think the case is quite differently postured and to some extent that has an affect on the period of compliance. Complying when the stakes are lower both in terms of the evidence and the potential penalties, to me, is not quite an apples-to-apples comparison as to what compliance might look

like now that the stakes are quite a bit raised, the evidence quite a bit more established; and in that setting the Court is not as comforted by the period of compliance prior to these federal charges and the new circumstances that I just outlined.

In terms of the potential danger to any person who are the community at large, we have as late as December of 2022, text messages to the complaining witness. We also have in January 2023 another text message to the complaining witness, again, this looks to be just before criminal charges were brought, but after complaints have been made. We've had statements, of course, that perhaps call into question the veracity of the complaining witness. And I think all of those things give the Court significant pause.

The fact that we have an attempt apparently based on the proffer to delete the video evidence in the time just prior to the preservation order, this would have been sometime in the late December, early January 2023, again, gives the Court some pause that there might be similar attempts. And, of course, the fact that Mr. Bendann was active on social media, which was one of the methods alleged to have been used in the activities in this case, and the allegations that past photos and video were being used to coerce additional video or perhaps coerce silence, not coming forward, those are all things, I think, shows by clear and convincing evidence that there is a danger to at least the complaining witness and perhaps others, if

```
indeed minor victims are coming forward as alleged by the
 1
 2
    Government.
                 So for those reasons I am going to detain you
 3
    pending your trial in this case.
 4
         Anything else then this morning, Ms. McGuinn?
                           No, Your Honor. The Defendant would
 5
             MS. MCGUINN:
    need to be arraigned. I know that you have a busy schedule and
 6
 7
    I know this probably went a little longer and I don't know that
 8
    counsel was prepared for that. But I bring that forward since
 9
   we're all here. But if not we can certainly do that another
10
    day.
11
             THE COURT: That's up to you, if you would like to do
12
    an arraignment now the Court is happy to do that. If you would
13
    prefer to do it at a later date, the Court is happy to do it at
14
    a later date?
15
             MR. FLOWERS: With the Court's indulgence can I meet
    with Mr. Bendann?
16
17
             THE COURT: Of course.
18
         (Counsel conferring with client.)
19
             MR. FLOWERS: Thank you, Your Honor.
                                                   I think
20
    Mr. Bendann would like to go ahead with the arraignment.
21
             THE COURT: All right. Very well.
22
             MR. FLOWERS:
                           I want to ask the Court, just given the
23
    Court's ruling, it's obviously very disappointing with us.
24
    Mr. Bendann could at least say goodbye to his father before he
25
    leaves the courtroom today.
```

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THE COURT: Any objection, Ms. McGuinn?

MS. MCGUINN: I only defer to whatever the marshals feel is appropriate as far as safety. But I don't personally have an objection, no.

THE COURT: All right. I should also point out,

Mr. Bendann, that you do have the right to appeal my ruling
today. The appeal is actually *de novo* review, it would be by
Judge Bredar of this court. You certainly have that avenue
open to you. Judge Bredar can revisit this issue of detention
if you and Mr. Flowers decide to do that.

MR. FLOWERS: The other piece Mr. Bendann would like the Court to know is obviously he's got some serious heart conditions and, unfortunately, the diet over at Super Max is not conducive to that. So if I could find out exactly what he needs, provide something to the Court, I'd appreciate if the Court can help us help Mr. Bendann so he can live as healthy life as he can over at Super Max.

THE COURT: Sure. There is -- I know that I saw an original communication of health need. Feel free to complete another one, forward it to the Court and the Court is happy to consider that. So is he -- is Mr. Bendann headed back to state custody at least for the time being or is he going to be remanded to Chesapeake Detention Facility.

MS. MCGUINN: He would be remanded to the custody here. He's still technically on release in the state case.

```
Although the state's attorney did file a motion to revoke his
 1
 2
    bond based on the findings in this case.
 3
             THE COURT: So he would be in U.S. marshal's custody.
             MR. FLOWERS: Yeah. Very well. So we are going
 4
 5
    through the arraignment. I'm going to tell you that I'll go
 6
    ahead and plead not guilty to all six counts, request a speedy
 7
    trial, and preserve all of our rights under the Constitution.
             THE COURT: So let me just go through some of the
 8
 9
    steps, Mr. Flowers, as we are required to do here in our court.
10
         So, Mr. Bendann, as Mr. Flowers explained, the arraignment
11
    is an opportunity to enter a plea in response to the indictment
12
    that was returned in this case. Mr. Flowers, you've had the
13
    opportunity to review the indictment with Mr. Bendann?
14
             MR. FLOWERS: Yes, Your Honor.
             THE COURT: And you waive a formal reading of --
15
16
             MR. FLOWERS: Waive -- exactly, Your Honor.
17
             THE COURT: Mr. Bendann, then, can you please respond
18
    to the questions of the courtroom deputy.
19
             THE CLERK: Please raise your right hand.
20
         (Defendant sworn.)
21
             THE CLERK: Please state your name for the record.
22
             THE DEFENDANT:
                             Christopher Bendann.
23
             THE CLERK: Thank you. You may put your hand down.
24
         Mr. Bendann, what is your age?
25
             THE DEFENDANT:
                             Thirty-nine.
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What year, just the year, were you born?
 1
             THE CLERK:
 2
             THE DEFENDANT:
                             1984.
 3
             THE CLERK: Have you read the indictment or has the
 4
    substance of the charges been explained to you?
 5
             THE DEFENDANT:
                            Yes.
             THE CLERK: Do you understand the charges?
 6
 7
             THE DEFENDANT:
                            Yes.
             THE CLERK: Mr. Flowers, are you satisfied that the
 8
 9
    Defendant understands the charges against him?
10
             MR. FLOWERS: Yes.
11
             THE CLERK: Mr. Bendann, you have been charged in
12
    Counts 1 through 5 and 6 of the indictment, what is your plea?
13
             THE DEFENDANT: Not quilty.
14
             THE CLERK:
                        Thank you.
             THE COURT: Mr. Flowers, you indicate that you do
15
16
    reserve a jury trial on behalf of Mr. Bendann; is that correct?
17
             MR. FLOWERS: Yes.
             THE COURT: And, Ms. McGuinn, the estimated length of
18
19
    the trial?
             MS. MCGUINN: Your Honor, at this point I would
20
21
    estimate a week.
22
             THE COURT: Any issues at this point with discovery?
23
             MS. MCGUINN: It's not yet begun but I'll contact
24
    Mr. Flowers to do a Rule 16.1 conference and then we can start
25
    getting that out almost immediately, some of it anyway.
```

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THE COURT: You'll stay in contact with Judge Bredar's
 1
 2
    chambers on scheduling matters?
 3
             MS. MCGUINN: Yes, sir.
 4
             THE COURT: All right. Thank you, everyone.
 5
             MS. MCGUINN: Thank you, Your Honor.
             THE CLERK: All rise. This Honorable Court now stands
 6
 7
    in recess.
         (Hearing adjourned at 11:45 p.m.)
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I, Ronda J. Thomas, certify that the foregoing is a true, correct, and complete transcript of the audio-recorded proceedings in the above-entitled matter, audio recorded via FTR Gold on August 21, 2023, and transcribed from the audio recording to the best of my ability, and that said transcript has been compared with the audio recording. Dated this 15th day of September 2023. RONDA J. THOMAS, RMR, CRR FEDERAL OFFICIAL COURT REPORTER

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